

No. 146

American Embassy,
Tehran, Iran, May 27, 1948CONFIDENTIAL

Subject: Helmand River Dispute.

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Sir:

1/

I have the honor to transmit herewith a memorandum of conversation which an officer of the Embassy had on May 15, 1948 with the Governor of Iranian Baluchistan and the Iranian Director-General of Agriculture relative to the Helmand River question. It will be observed that while these officials confirmed reports that the Seistan area was well supplied with water at the present time, they both had grave misgivings regarding the future, and one of them went so far as to express the opinion that Iran should break off negotiations with Afghanistan regarding this question and go to war in defense of its rights.

2/

There is also transmitted herewith the text, translated from the local press, of a statement made in the Majlis on May 16, 1948, by Mr. Musa Kuri-Esfandiary, Minister of Foreign Affairs, outlining the steps taken by the Iranian Government with regard to the solution of the dispute with Afghanistan respecting the waters of the Helmand River. As pointed out in the Embassy's telegram No. 534 of May 17, 1948, the Foreign Minister's remarks were in reply to questions raised by several members of the Majlis, who were quite critical of the Government's handling of this matter.

3/, 4/

There are also enclosed, for the information of the Department and the Embassy in Kabul, extracts from two recent articles in the Tehran press regarding the Helmand River. It will have been observed from the Embassy's recent reports on the press that a number of newspapers have referred to this subject in the last few weeks, and most have been critical of the Government's handling of the dispute.

The first of the enclosed articles, from the pro-Communist KARDOL, organ of the Tudeh Party, is of some interest as illustrating what is evidently the Communist line on the question, namely, that the United States has deliberately created the Helmand problem in order to provide a pretext for intervention in the question.

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The second article, from the independent left-wing DAD, is quite critical of Afghanistan and, like the Governor of Baluchistan in the conversation mentioned above, expresses the view that the Iranian Government may have to take matters into its own hands.

Respectfully yours,

John C. Wiley

Enclosures:

- 1/, Memorandum of Conversation,
- 2/, Translation, statement of
Minister of Foreign Affairs.
- 3/, Translation from IARDOM.
- 4/, Translation from DAD.

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Wilson:vcn

Copy for Kabul.

To Department in original and hectograph.

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Enclosure No. 1 to Despatch No.
116, dated May 27, 1948, from
American Embassy, Tehran, Iran.

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

DATE: May 15, 1948

PARTICIPANTS:

His Excellency Assadollah Khozeimeh Alam,
Governor of Iranian Baluchistan.
His Excellency Hossein Khozeimeh Alam,
Director General of Iranian Ministry
of Agriculture.

Mr. Evan M. Wilson,
First Secretary of Embassy.

SUBJECT: Helmand River Dispute.

In conversation today both the Governor of Baluchistan and his cousin, the Director General of Agriculture, expressed the gravest concern with regard to the apparent reluctance of the Afghan Government to come to an agreement regarding the Helmand. The Governor, who has just returned to Tehran, told me that he had recently visited Zabol and the Seistan area, and had never seen so much water as there is there now. He confirmed newspaper reports that conditions were very good at the moment but said that the majority of the farmers were hesitating to plant anything because of uncertainty as to the future. Moreover, due to the fact that the rains in the Helmand basin did not begin this year until January instead of October, as is customary, only about one-quarter of the usual winter planting was done. As a result the outlook is extremely serious, and there is a general fear in the region that unless some drastic action is taken by the central government, there will be a recurrence of last summer's drought.

The Director General of Agriculture confirmed the foregoing from reports reaching his ministry. Both these gentlemen reiterated the prevailing Iranian attitude that Afghanistan is deliberately holding back the water of the river. I remarked that our military air attache on a recent trip to Kabul had spoken with the American engineers working for the Morrison-Knudsen Company, who had shown him their plans for the development of the Helmand region. I said our attache was convinced from this conversation that not only was nothing contemplated that would in any way injure Iran, but that actually the construction of certain storage dams might be in Iran's interest, as the water would thus be conserved for use throughout the year.

The two Messrs. Alam said they could not understand why, if this were the case, Afghanistan should not allow the Iranians to come and see for themselves what was being done. They expressed appreciation for the assistance of the Department of State but were doubtful that Afghanistan would agree either to permit the Iranian Ambassador at Kabul to visit the Helmand area, or to set

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up the commission proposed by the Department. The Governor of Baluchistan went so far as to say that the thought it was hopeless to look for any agreement with Afghanistan. He believed Iran should break off relations and go to war in defense of its rights. I was amazed at the intensity of his feeling on this point as in my acquaintance with him I have always found his approach to most subjects to be quite reasonable.

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American Embassy, Tehran, Iran.

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TRANSLATION

STATEMENT OF MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS

THE HELM AND

Source: Journal de Tehran of May 18, 1948:

At Sunday's session of Parliament, Mr. Nuri-Asfandiary, Minister of Foreign Affairs, replying to the questions of deputies relative to the Helmand, made a statement of which the substance appears below:

"The 24 of Asfand,"* Mr. Nuri-Asfandiary stated, "the Government received a report from the Iranian Embassy in Washington outlining the viewpoint of the Department of State regarding the division of the waters of the Helmand.

"Here is a summary of this report: A technical commission comprising three representatives chosen from neutral states by the Iranian and Afghan Governments would inspect the whole course of the river in Iran and in Afghanistan. In its study of all the problems relative to the Helmand,--such as the determination of the volume of water, the number of tributaries of the river, the building of dams, and the temporary irrigation of Seistan until the conclusion of a definite agreement on this subject,--the commission in question, while taking into consideration similar agreements reached in this field between other countries, should draft a detailed report to be submitted to the two governments.

"For their part, the two parties should make known their concurrence or refusal within thirty days from the receipt of the report.

"The Iranian Government, after examining the proposal of the United States Department of State, accepted/it with a few modifications of detail. For example, it requested the presence of an Iranian representative on the commission and a period of sixty days during which it would make known its refusal or acceptance of the report of the commission.

"The 15 of Farvardin, 1327** the acceptance of the American position was communicated to the Iranian Embassy in Washington. I myself requested the United States Ambassador to inform the Iranian Government as soon as possible regarding the result of the conversations which were taking place in the Department of State with regard to the Helmand.

"Moreover, a telegram was sent to the Iranian Embassy in Kabul stating that as during the next month the level of the waters would fall considerably, it was necessary to begin conversations at once with the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a view to guaranteeing water for Seistan during the course of the summer season.

"The Iranian

* March 15.

** April 4, 1948.

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"The Iranian Embassy in Kabul was also instructed to request the Afghan Government to stop the digging of the Boghra Canal, the work on which, according to reports received from Iranian officials in Seistan, is requiring thousands of laborers.

"Moreover, the Afghan Ambassador in Tehran in every interview which I have had with him, has assured me that he will do all that he can to reach a solution of the question of the Helmand.

"In the time of the late Reza Shah Pahlevi, conversations undertaken between the two governments for the conclusion of a satisfactory agreement resulted in the signature of the agreement of 1317.* According to the terms of this agreement, the two parties were of the opinion that the waters of the Helmand as far as the Kamal Khan Dam** would be divided equally between Iran and Afghanistan. Although the agreement and the declaration signed by the representatives of the two governments at Kabul were approved by Parliament and although the Afghan Government in turn approved them, the Afghan Parliament refused to ratify them and it was accordingly not possible to put the agreement in question into force.

"It is to be regretted that the Afghan Government refused to ratify the proclamation relative to the safeguarding of the waters of Seistan, especially as the Iranian Government expected an entirely different attitude on the part of a neighboring and friendly state. All of the efforts of the Iranian Government in 1317*** with a view to obtaining the approval of the Afghan Parliament to the proclamation were unsuccessful. Likewise, the proposals of the Iranian Government, put forward with complete impartiality and with a perfect understanding of the interest of both parties, were rejected. By the start of the year 1327**** we were convinced that the Afghan Parliament would not ratify the declaration. The Iranian Government then proposed that Iranian engineers and experts, in cooperation with a delegation of Afghan experts, should inspect the course of the Helmand and draft a detailed report to serve as a basis for new conversations with a view to the settlement of the dispute.

"Unfortunately, this proposal was also rejected. It was then proposed that the Iranian Minister of Agriculture, accompanied by a delegation, would proceed to the area to inspect the course of the Helmand, undertake negotiations with the Afghan authorities and, finally, arrive at a tangible result. Although the Afghan Government offered no objection insofar as concerned the visit of the Minister of Agriculture, it raised certain questions and created difficulties of a nature to make the Iranian Government despair of the possibility of arriving at a practical result.

"The American

* The reference is to the convention signed at Kabul January 26, 1939.

** Band-e-Kamal Khan.

*** 1938-39

**** March 21, 1948.

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"The American Government asked certain questions of the Iranian Government concerning the volume of water necessary for the irrigation of Seistan in the different months of the year, the area of arable land in Seistan, the dispatch of a neutral delegation to inquire into the volume of water, and the participation of Iran in the construction of reservoirs for water; and at the same time inquired as to the attitude of the Government relative to the definitive division of the waters of the Helmand, etc. After examining these questions the Iranian Government replied. The Government of the United States put the same questions to the Afghan Government.

"This gives the present position with regard to the Helmand. You Deputies now know the problem. I think that between two neighboring and friendly countries whose territory is irrigated by the waters of the same river, perfect understanding must rule on a basis of equity.

"As regards further developments in this matter, that is to say, the intervention of the Government of the United States and the designation of a commission of inquiry, I have for the time being nothing to say to you, for the problem is now under study. I hope, however, that in the near future I will be able to inform you of the result.

"I repeat that I hope that the Afghan Government will be willing to take this question under consideration and cooperate with a view to reaching a solution in a spirit of understanding and friendship, so that we shall not be obliged to have recourse to international machinery so long as it is possible for the dispute to be resolved in a friendly manner between the two parties."

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American Embassy, Tehran, Iran.

May 21, 1948

TRANSLATION

WAR AND PEACE POLICIES

PARDON in a lengthy article mentions the Helmand River question and calls it a political matter. The writer of the article mentions Mr. Bolster, the Agricultural Attache's, trip to Seistan and the Hamoun Lake and presumes that this journey to that territory has had close connection with the Helmand problem where the Americans have intentionally created such problems and difficulties in order to have plausible reasons for their interference. "The Americans," says the paper, "are now appointed as arbiter in the matter. Our dispute on this river is an old one and it had to be referred to the UNO, but in a discussion which went on between George Allen and the head of our government then, the matter was suddenly referred to America rather than to the UNO and America introduced herself as the only arbiter. In his explanations a few days ago the Foreign Minister briefly mentioned this point that America was now supposed to issue the verdict in this respect." The writer of the article adds that from what was expressed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs it could be deduced that the fate of Iran is first discussed in the corridors of the U. S. Foreign Department rather than in the responsible quarters of this country.

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Inclosure No. 4 to Despatch No.
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TRANSLATION

IRAN'S NOTE TO THE GOVERNMENT OF AFGHANISTAN

DAD. "Iran has presented a note to the Government of Afghanistan regarding the Helmand River and has threatened the Afghan Government should the latter not consider Iran's share in the water of that river.

"Since the supplementary clause to the Agreement of 1317* and other proposals made by the Iranian Government regarding the Helmand River have not been accepted by the Afghan Government and inasmuch as the Iranian Government cannot agree with the Treaty of 1317 without this supplementary clause, it is, therefore, understood that Iran, as the practice has been hitherto, claims her right to her share in the water of this river, supported by the Goldsmid arbitration to the effect that Afghanistan has no right to undertake activities along the banks of this river which might lessen Iran's share of its water, for which reason Iran has been given the right to watch Afghanistan's actions in this respect. And, should Iran not get her share of the water and should Afghanistan continue her unfriendly and unjust attitude, the Iranian Government will be obliged to take necessary steps in order to secure her rights."

* 1939.